

# **“WHAT WORKS”**

## **INFORMATION SHEET**

*“What Works”* is a term used nationally by correctional agencies in reference to researched principles and practices common to effective public safety and offender programming. *“What Works”* research has also identified the offender attributes, “Criminogenic Risks and Needs,” that successful correctional programs must target. (Gendreau, P. & Andrews, D.A. 1990)

The mission of a *“What Works”* system states that public safety and offender change are accomplished by risk control and risk reduction through an integrated system of sanctions and interventions. A *“What Works”* environment means that everyone who has anything to do directly or indirectly with an offender, from entry into the system to completion, is focused on assisting that person to be successful and is consistent on how they do that.

Effective treatment based on *“What Works”* must address:

- Criminogenic Risk
- Criminogenic Need
- Responsivity
- Relapse Prevention Strategies

### **Criminogenic Risk**

Attributes associated with criminal behaviors and recidivism include (Gendreau, P. & Andrews, D.A. 1990):

1. Anti-social attitudes, values, and beliefs (criminal thinking)
2. Pro-criminal associates and isolation from pro-social associates
3. Particular temperament and behavioral characteristics (e.g., egocentrism)
4. Weak problem-solving and social skills
5. Criminal history
6. Negative family factors (i.e., abuse, unstructured or undisciplined environment), criminality in the family, substance abuse in the family)
7. Low levels of vocational and educational skills
8. Substance abuse.

The more risk factors present, the greater the risk for committing criminal acts.

## **The Risk Principle**

The risk principle embodies the assumption that criminal behavior can be predicted for individual offenders on the basis of certain factors. Some factors, such as criminal history, are static and unchangeable. Others, such as substance abuse, antisocial attitudes and antisocial associates, are dynamic and changeable. With proper assessment of these factors, researchers and practitioners have demonstrated that it is possible to classify offenders according to their relative likelihood of committing new offenses with as much as 80 percent accuracy. Application of the risk principle requires matching levels of intensity of treatment with the risk levels of offenders. High-risk offenders require intensive interventions to reduce recidivism, while low-risk offenders benefit most from low intensity interventions or no intervention at all. (Gendreau, P. & Andrews, D.A. 1990)

## **The Criminogenic Need Principle**

Most offenders have many needs. However, certain needs are directly linked to crime. Criminogenic Needs constitute dynamic risk factors or attributes of offenders that, when changed, influence the probability of recidivism. Non-criminogenic needs may also be dynamic and changeable, but they are not directly associated with new offense behavior. (Gendreau, P. & Andrews, D.A. 1990) Effective treatment should be targeted toward these criminogenic needs. Any treatment not targeting criminogenic needs is counterproductive to efficiency and effectiveness.

## **The Responsivity Principle**

The Responsivity Principle refers to the delivery of treatment programs in a manner that is consistent with the ability and learning style of an offender. Treatment effectiveness (as measured by recidivism) is influenced by the interaction between offender characteristics (relative empathy, cognitive ability, maturity, gender, race, motivation, etc.) and service characteristics (location, structure, skill and interest of providers, counselor characteristics, etc.)

Client responsivity factors can include:

- Mental Health
- Age, gender, race, ethnicity considerations
- Readiness & motivation to change
- Levels of psychological development
- Development issues
- Cognitive functioning
- Learning styles

To maximize treatment effectiveness it is important to match:

1. The learning style and personality of the offender with the treatment approach
2. The offender characteristics with the therapist characteristics
3. The skills of the offender with the type of program

Application of the Risk Principle helps identify *who should receive treatment*, the Criminogenic Need principle focuses on *what should be treated*, and the Responsivity Principle underscores the importance of *how treatment should be delivered*. (Gendreau, P. & Andrews, D.A. 1990)

### **The Backbone of “What Works”**

**Social Learning** – The primary tenet of social learning theory is that people can learn new behaviors, attitudes and feelings by observing other people and events followed by individual practice of appropriate thoughts and behaviors.

**Cognitive Programs** – Are based on the theory that how people think determines how they act and that all people are capable of changing their thought processes and thereby, their behaviors.

### **Essential Components of a “What Works” System**

1. Leadership models competent in data driven service approaches
2. Evidence-based practice
3. The availability of a full continuum of services from assessment through aftercare/discharge
4. Community collaboration and partnership
5. Balanced decision-making